

Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain

Supply Chain - The Humanitarian Lifeline
Linking the Network, Multiplying Impact

Report on the outcome of the
Thematic Workshops

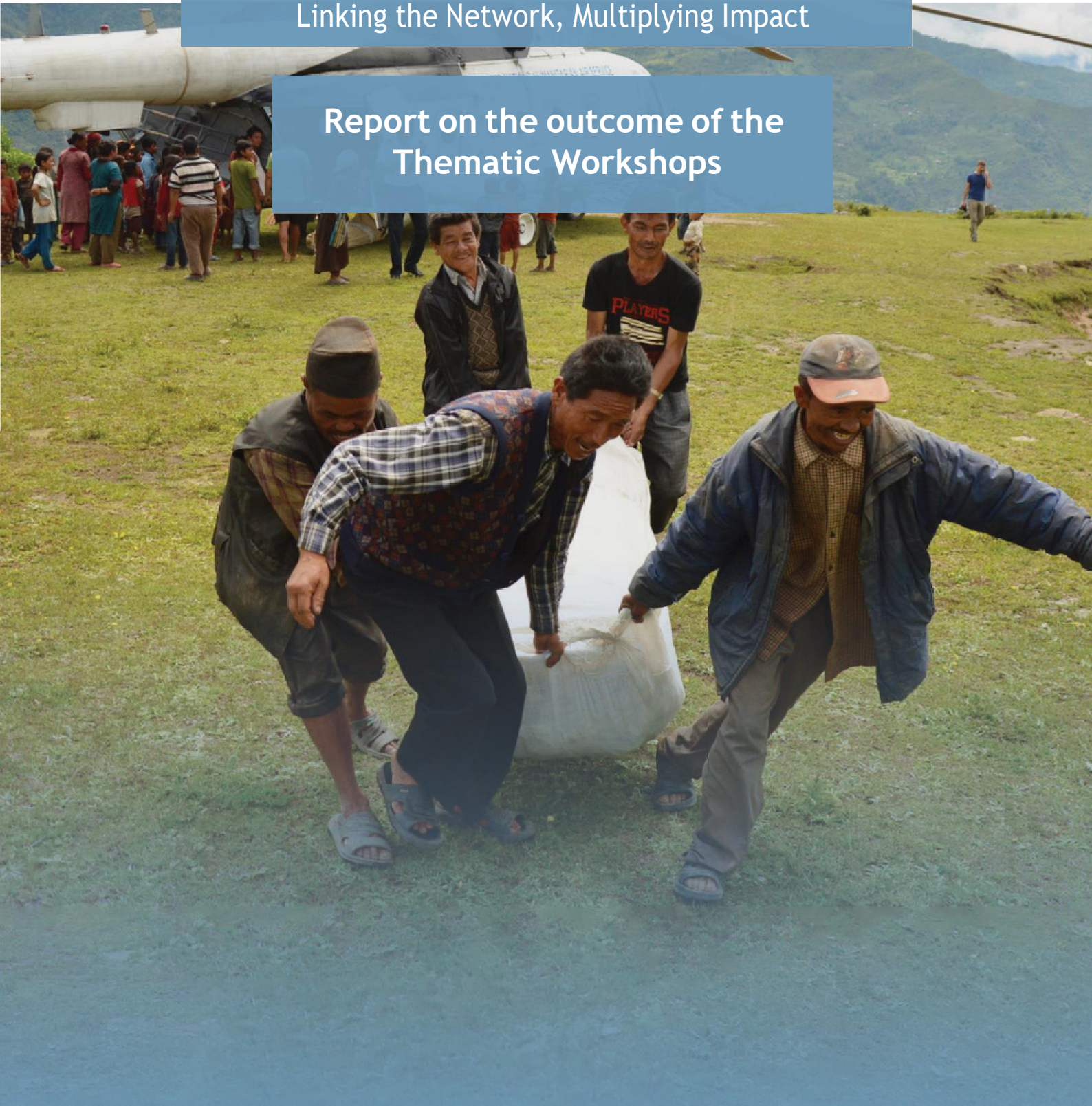


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HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP GROUP ON SUPPLY CHAIN

REPORT

ON THE OUTCOME OF THE THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Introduction

The Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain (HLGSC) initiative was launched as an opportunity to significantly improve how humanitarian aid is provided to the people we serve, making the humanitarian supply chain more efficient and effective.

At the kick-off meeting convened by the European Commission on 4 December 2024, participants acknowledged the importance of developing a more strategic approach to supply chain. In that context, they agreed to hold workshops on five intertwined areas of supply chain: procurement, environmental sustainability, digitalisation, preparedness and localisation. The intention was for the outcomes of the workshops to be considered at a final conference at leadership level, with the aim of endorsing a concrete set of actions, including in the short-term¹.

The workshops took place under the co-leadership of France, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), World Economic Forum (WEF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Kuehne Foundation (in an advisory role), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC)². Preparatory work gathered expert contributions and was validated through wide consultation³. Participants attended from over 70 organisations, including donors, UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, academia and the private sector.

This report, prepared by the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (DG ECHO), acting as secretariat of the process, provides a consolidated overview of the outcomes of the thematic workshops⁴ to be considered at the HLGSC High-Level Conference on 10 December 2025.

Discussions during the workshops were extremely rich, identifying over 100 actions for follow-up. These can be found in the Outcome Documents, which summarise the findings of the individual workshops. The actions range from broad and long-term to concrete first steps in each key thematic area.

¹Conclusions of the Humanitarian Leadership Group on Supply Chain meeting of 4 December 2024 [link to be inserted]

²The **procurement** and **environmental sustainability** workshops (Lyon, 12-14 May 2025) were hosted by France, and co-led respectively by France and UNHCR, and by WFP and NRC. The **digitalisation** workshop (Geneva, 1 – 2 July 2025) was hosted by WEF which co-led it with IRC and the advisory support of the Kuehne Foundation. The **preparedness** and **localisation** workshops (Copenhagen, 29 September – 1 October 2025) were hosted by UNICEF and co-led with IFRC and DRC.

³ Interviews and consultations were conducted with more than 160 thematic experts.

⁴ The Outcome Documents of the workshops can be found in annex 3 (separate document).

Based on the workshops' findings, this Report⁵:

- identifies the systemic barriers that must be addressed in a synchronised way across all areas of supply chain, and a set of corresponding “barrier-breakers”;
- charts a path towards addressing these barriers through a shared vision of the Humanitarian Supply Chain, to be underpinned by a Supply Chain Charter of Principles by the end of 2026;
- sets out a structured way forward towards this vision and Charter, through interim working groups on the existing five thematic areas. This will be supported by a mechanism to ensure a synchronised approach. Once established, these working groups will immediately follow up on the actions identified by the workshops (see Annex 1);
- Annex 2 identifies key actions and the proposed first steps that are considered essential to arrive at the overall vision. These will guide the core of the work plans of the interim working groups.

1. The need for change

Supply chain is the humanitarian lifeline - ensuring that communities in need receive the right relief items, of the right quality, in the right quantities, at the right time. Humanitarian supply chain accounts for an estimated 60 – 80 % of total humanitarian expenditure - from procurement to delivery. Therefore, relatively modest performance gains can have significant real-world impact on the populations we serve. Better cost-effectiveness should allow more people to be helped overall, in ways that better meets their needs. As most humanitarian actors operate separate independent supply chains, there is significant potential to improve performance by working together.

The current context is one of growing humanitarian needs due to the proliferation of humanitarian crises including of a more protracted nature; increased intensity and frequency of weather-related disasters due to climate change; and substantial funding cuts. To transition to a humanitarian aid sector fit to respond to these challenges, the outcome documents of the workshops agree on the need to **move towards a more collaborative and interoperable supply chain model** that ensures increased efficiency, effectiveness, and impact, building on progress that has already been made and linking existing initiatives.

2. Systemic barriers and “barrier-breakers”

The main finding is clear. While the decentralised and diverse structure of the humanitarian system can contribute to ensuring reach and resilience, it also constrains network-scale improvement. Over the years, there have been many well-designed

⁵ This document does not necessarily reflect the official position of DG ECHO.

initiatives to improve humanitarian supply chain cooperation. However, they have struggled to reach critical mass and interconnect sufficiently to bring about systemic change. Isolated gains, however valuable, cannot deliver sector transformation.

Six systemic barriers that prevent humanitarian supply chains from moving towards a more collaborative and interoperable network have emerged from the workshops. For each barrier, the analysis of the outcome documents has identified a 'barrier-breaker'.

The first three must take place in sequence - going from deciding on a common vision and approach to supply chain with the HLGSC; alignment of policy and guidance; and aligning operational practices around shared standards and interoperable tools. The other three are cross-cutting and need to be launched as a matter of priority (setting up a collaborative framework, financing, and transparency through data).

Barrier 1: Different strategies and aims — Organisations approach the humanitarian supply chain in different ways, e.g., as a set of technical systems, delivery functions, strategic enablers, or compliance tools. While each perspective is valid and can be the result of differing mandates and core work, this hinders shared direction and a networked approach.

- **Setting a Sector wide Vision and Approach** — Recognition across the humanitarian space of supply chain as a collective strategic enabler of humanitarian outcomes, will allow organisations to foster increased cooperation. Convergence on this vision and way forward is the necessary starting point for system-level change, and a foundation for a network wherein supply chains reinforce one another, based on common principles.

Barrier 2: Divergent Policy and Guidance — Organisations develop their policies independently. This diversity makes both planning and implementation of operations harder to synchronise across organisations.

- **Policy and Guidance Alignment** - Aligning key elements of supply chain policies as well as the resultant guidance, could better enable collaborative planning and operations, supporting coordination, increased efficiency, and adaptation to local contexts where needed. This alignment should be complemented by use of mutual recognition. Overall, this would ensure that collective approaches link with global and national strategies and frameworks.

Barrier 3: Fragmentation across Operational Practices — Day-to-day operating practices differ widely, with varied use of standards, scalable tools, and sustainable methods. This diversity limits opportunities for interoperability, scaling, and accountability across the network.

- **Aligning operational practices around shared standards and interoperable tools** will allow responses to be implemented more consistently, efficiently, and effectively, while maintaining organisational autonomy to adapt to context. Modular approaches to tools and standards adaptable to sector specific needs can help ensure flexibility.

Barrier 4: Lack of Collaboration and Accountability — System-wide coordination and accountability mechanisms are not yet consistently in place. The current set up encourages organisations to continue to operate independently, which results in

parallel systems and fragmented delivery, and therefore missed opportunities for efficiencies.

- **A Collaborative Framework for Change** - A sector-wide process for clarifying roles and developing collaboration/coordination and accountability mechanisms would ensure coherent and collective progress.

Barrier 5: Maladapted Financing — Current financing and compliance practices often limit flexibility; combined with supply chain not treated as a strategic activity within organisations, this perpetuates a fragmented approach, with equitable access also more difficult for some actors, particularly national ones. Without adaptable models, reprioritisations, and adequate engagement from the private sector, it is hard to move to strategic and collective policies, and practices.

- **Adaptable and Equitable Financing** — Coordinated and flexible financing models and harmonised compliance frameworks, along with reprioritisation of supply chain as a strategic activity within organisations, would enable resources to support collective objectives and ensure predictable and sustainable operations, and expand access for national actors.

Barrier 6: Lack of Data and Measurement — Data across the humanitarian supply chain is uneven, difficult to access, and not easily comparable. This reduces visibility, weakens accountability, predictability, and limits the ability to guide strategic investment.

- **Transparency Through Data** — Adopting shared standards for data and measurement and connecting data and measurement systems would ensure visibility and coordination across the network where appropriate. This would enable better-evidence based decision-making and create the forecasting needed to improve performance over time.

3. Charting the path towards a Shared Vision for the Humanitarian Supply Chain

The workshops' findings point towards a shared vision for the humanitarian supply chain based on the following core components:

Moving from a Fragmented System Towards a Collaborative, Coherent, Network

There is an urgent need for **system-level collaboration and coordination**, moving to a **networked approach across the sector**. Each workshop, in its own domain, identified the limits of organisation-centric action and called for a sector-level collaboration. The humanitarian system is composed of a large number of independent actors working to their best ability to assist communities in need. However, the humanitarian system also suffers from inherent inefficiencies, unnecessary duplication of effort and fragmentation. A structured approach is needed to align supply chain strategies, share resources across organisations, and establish increased transparency across the system.

Whenever possible, working together through joined-up approaches, platforms and operations should become the **default operating model** across the various stages of supply chain management.

- *Alignment, interoperability, and shared tools and data*

The call for greater collaboration and closer coordination is intrinsically linked to the need for **alignment**, e.g. of data, standards, specifications, and regulations. In turn, alignment paves the way to **interoperability**. Alignment facilitates this interoperability of tools allowing integration with flexibility. It also allows the building of core common tools for the sector to use, rather than having each organisation build its own bespoke, incompatible systems. This would reduce waste of resources and enable data aggregation for better decision-making and performance monitoring.

Also important is the need to invest in **shared tools, incorporating forecasting**, that can offer a level of scale and sophistication that would not be possible individually. Leveraging the power of interoperable data can allow for more efficient and accurate anticipatory action, harvesting a wealth of valuable information to inform future decisions.

- *Enabling the change and driving it from within*

The workshops concluded that **humanitarian organisations and donors, alongside other key actors, can drive this systemic transformation.**

For this to happen, supply chain functions should not remain siloed within **humanitarian organisations**. Supply chain management needs to be considered as a core strategic component of the decision-making and policy planning and not just as a support service. This shift needs to be supported by concerted efforts to foster **professionalisation and collaboration**, notably building new competencies. In the humanitarian sector, supply chain has long been seen as a role to be performed by generalists. To move to a more advanced, strategic and coordinated approach within and between organisations, it must be recognised that specialised knowledge and skills are required. Lessons can be learned from the private sector, where this higher level of professionalisation has already occurred. It is also key to note that where supply chain is critical for the objectives of an organisation, representation at strategic decision-making level, ideally in the boardroom, is essential.

For their part, **donors** should use **funding mechanisms and requirements** - often identified as a key bottleneck - as powerful levers for change in building the system's architecture. In this context, the gradual introduction of conditionalities to support and bring about the paradigm shift in humanitarian supply chain should also be considered. In doing so, they should aim to align funding with strategic priorities and avoid supporting duplicative efforts or initiatives that fall outside the agreed vision.

Donors should come together to discuss and identify misalignments in compliance and regulation, and explore where harmonisation is most feasible. There are areas

where national legislation may be a limiting factor to alignment of regulation, but a concerted effort by donors is needed to map out what is possible.

The humanitarian sector has long sought to further engage the **private sector**, but these efforts have failed to meet expectations. The approaches have been ad hoc so far. Often, parts of the humanitarian sector will approach individual companies about specific projects and initiatives, whereas it would be more appealing and have greater impact for the private sector to be involved in longer-term shaping of system-wide solutions. The supply chain offers this opportunity – it is where the two sectors share common ground and language, given the humanitarian supply chain’s use of private sector supply chain for a large proportion of its work. To collaborate on the scale required to bring real system-level change, there must be engagement with the private sector at an aggregate, policy level, with the private sector positioned as an integral partner in a mutually beneficial effort.

Academia also has a key role to play, offering expertise and helping transform research into practice, as well as supporting the tracking of overall progress.

4. Thematic Areas

This process has been grounded in a logical division across the **five thematic areas** of procurement, environmental sustainability, digitalisation, preparedness, and localisation. Rather than fully disaggregating the findings across these areas and reattributing them under cross-cutting themes identified, they have been maintained as distinct areas of work going forward. The reason for this is that these reflect where supply chain discussions, workstreams, and interlocutors have already clustered, and therefore the most efficient way for these to continue. To ensure that interlinkages and cross-cutting factors are fully and proactively integrated and addressed, a mechanism to feed these into the process will be established.

Analysis of the outcome documents has established that the overall pathways for the five thematic areas should be as follows:

Procurement should evolve from a transactional process into a strategic function that drives efficiency, value, and shared outcomes. This requires stronger collaboration across partners and a proactive role in shaping operational priorities rather than simply facilitating purchases.

Environmental sustainability must be integrated into every aspect of humanitarian operations to reduce emissions and environmental impact. It should be a core consideration in planning and decision-making, ensuring that humanitarian action protects both people and the planet.

Digitalisation of humanitarian aid is a must, advancing from fragmented, stand-alone tools toward an interoperable ecosystem that improves efficiency, transparency, and

measurable impact. Such a system should enable data sharing, accountability, and inclusive digital access for all actors.

Preparedness must become a system-wide norm, ensuring that readiness and resilience are embedded in all humanitarian structures and practices.

Localisation requires true power-sharing through equitable partnerships that transfer not only responsibilities but also authority, resources, and leadership to national and local actors.

5. Key areas of work

To move towards this model, the outcome documents put forward over 100 actions across the five thematic areas. This reflects the engagement of participants and the wealth of the discussion. The actions differ in nature, scope, and degree of details (Annex 3). They range from strategic/high-level actions to very detailed and technical ones.

Furthermore, some of the actions are more mature and ready for implementation whereas others are still at an earlier stage where implementation would require sustained medium or long-term investment.

The interdependencies between the thematic areas highlight the need for integrated reform. The outcome documents indicate the importance of the interlinkages across the five thematic areas. Progress in one area unlocks potential in others - and neglecting one can undermine the entire process.

Additionally, these areas must address the six “barrier-breakers” in a consistent way – to not do so could create a siloing of the thematic areas and limit the potential upside for system-wide positive impact.

To adequately address the complex challenges within the thematic areas and across them, a scale of **collaboration** will be required that is only possible through an organised set of fora, leveraging existing structures. To ensure progress and accountability, this will need to be based on shared overall **work programme**.

The outcome documents provide indications of **roles, responsibilities and accountabilities** across the actors involved in the humanitarian supply chains. This will need to be further considered and refined by working groups, which will follow up and further develop the outputs of the individual thematic areas.

To provide the required confidence for a reform on this scale, the last two workshops at the end of the process pointed to the need to **develop a dedicated strategic framework** in the form of a **Supply Chain Charter of Principles**. Such a charter would build on and complement existing coordination and reform initiatives by establishing a shared vision and set of principles that define roles, accountability, and collaboration across national, international, humanitarian, development, and private sector actors. It would help align fragmented efforts, bridge preparedness and

response, and strengthen collective accountability for building coherent, locally led, and resilient humanitarian supply chains.

Across all workshops, it was noted that achieving systemic change requires a shift in mindset and ways of working. The Charter – as a strategic framework with a shared vision - and the overall work programme should fit together coherently, using common terms and language. This would guide this transformation and support advocacy through internal leadership, unified messaging, and clear and timely engagement across the sector.

6. Next steps

The HLGSC represents a unique opportunity to reimagine humanitarian supply chains as strategic enablers of aid effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability.

By working together across organisations, sectors, and geographies, the humanitarian community can transform supply chains from fragmented mechanisms into an integrated network that delivers greater value to affected populations.

To ensure follow-up, a **collaboration framework** could be established to deliver the overall shared work programme.⁶

In this context, **thematic working groups** could be set up on an interim basis, building in the **existing workstreams**: procurement, environmental sustainability, digitalisation, preparedness and localisation.

These groups would develop specific **workplans** based on the workshop recommendations, starting from actions for priority follow-up (annex 2). In this regard, particular attention should be paid to those actions needed to lay down the bases for further progress.

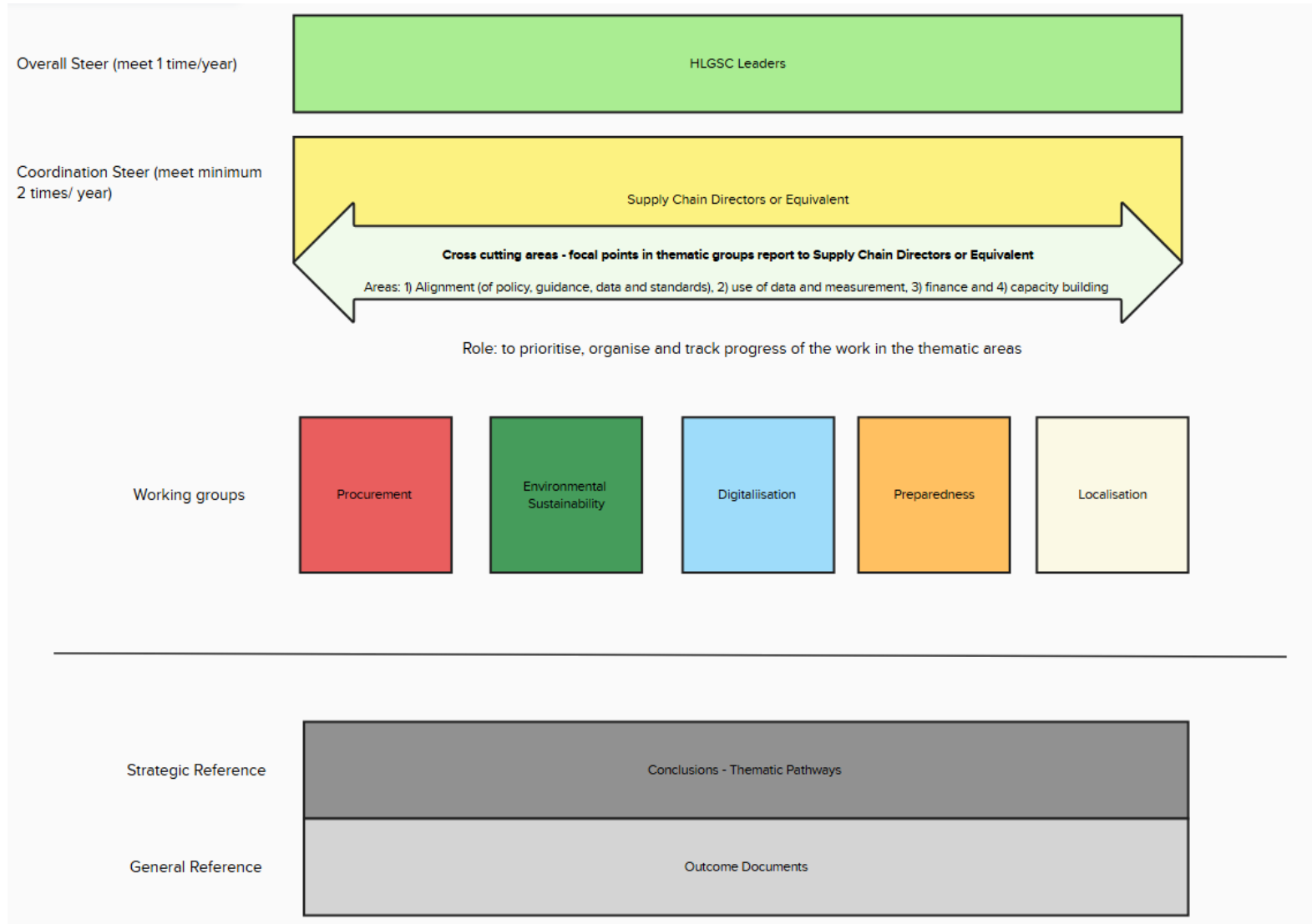
Moreover, a **coordination group** at the appropriate senior level, notably at the level of directors of supply chain or equivalent, could address cross-cutting issues and ensure coherence.

Regular reporting and peer review mechanisms could ensure accountability and progress tracking.

On this basis, **leaders' High-Level Group** could assess progress and provide further steer to the reform process.

⁶Follow-up work may lead to the adoption of specific commitments to be endorsed by participants in accordance with their respective decision-making procedures.

ANNEX 1 - Preliminary proposal for HLGSC Collaboration Framework



ANNEX 2 - Preliminary list of priority actions

This list represents an initial and non-exhaustive selection of some actions considered most key across all the workshops, and first steps that can be taken. This list will need to be refined further as the collaborative framework is set up and working groups establish workplans based on a review of the outcome documents, steer provided by the conclusions, and “barrier-breakers”.

Procurement

Action	Proposed first steps
<p>Humanitarian Organisations (HOs) establish a single global strategic forum for procurement to share knowledge, tools, resources, and align practice, by upscaling and linking existing procurement networks (particularly IAPG, UNHLCM PM).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOs establish a temporary committee to organise the first meeting of the global strategic forum and a work plan. This will be the procurement working group under the collaboration framework. As part of this, the committee maps existing procurement initiatives including their mandate, scope, and objectives and identify key gaps.
<p>The Forum prepares guidelines on procurement cooperation and collaboration. As part of this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UN provide standardised guidelines on the use of its procurement outcomes (such as supplier selection) and contracts by non-UN actors. - NGOs provide guidelines on use of procurement outcomes and systematically allow piggybacking on their contracts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HO commit to adopting collaborative procurement practices, such as harmonized sourcing strategies, shared procurement outcomes, framework agreements, and, where appropriate, joint procurement and mutualisation more widely.
<p>HOs develop guidelines on procurement in strategic planning and end-to-end project management developed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOs draft and pilot best practice guidelines on integration of procurement into organisational strategy, accompanying 3-5 organisations in the process.
<p>HOs set up a process to establish a set of best practice boardroom level procurement performance indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOs which have implemented supply chain key performance indicators propose draft sectoral standards, as well as guidelines for implementation. They pilot these by accompanying 3-5 organisations in adoption.
<p>HOs strengthened procurement professionalisation is via training targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HOs establish a common procurement competency matrix

Environmental sustainability

Action

Proposed first steps

Donors and HOs agree to calculate emission including Scope 3 emissions using a standardised, high-quality carbon footprint methodology.

Donors support the [Humanitarian Carbon Calculator](#) (HCC), widely recognised as the most practical tool currently available, continues to be developed and funded.

HOs – with support from donors - jointly identify key Life-Cycle Assessment (LCA) data gaps per sector. They mobilise private sector contribution to high-quality, shareable LCA data to fill identified gaps, working collaboratively where feasible.

HOs use LCA data to guide procurement, prioritising sustainability alongside localisation. A shared, public LCA repository support evidence-based decisions and collective learning.

Donors fund waste management as a core programme cost in humanitarian contexts.

HOs take responsibility for the waste they generate by embedding sustainable, context-appropriate waste management as a strategic organisational function.

- **Donors and HOs** use existing tools such as the Humanitarian Carbon Calculator (HCC) to measure their emission and implement concrete reduction activities.

- **Donors** bridge the HCC funding gap

- **HOs** organisations identify gaps in existing LCA and develop proposals to secure funding for LCAs of 3 key products per thematic sector.

- **HOs** publish and share LCA findings more broadly, by uploading them to public repositories

- **HOs** use existing LCA data or similar evidence to revise product specifications - making them more environmentally sustainable - and share these specifications with others via the WREC Coalition's Green Procurement Specifications Repository. They integrate criteria related to environmental sustainability in competitive procurement processes, while ensuring that this does not put small or local suppliers at a disadvantage.

- **Donors** fund waste management as part of programme (rather than support) costs. They explicitly state and communicate to their partners that such costs are eligible and promote the integration of sustainable waste management - including through joint approaches and reverse logistics with other organisations - into planning and measuring, proposal development, and budgeting.

- **HOs** embed sustainable waste management in their internal organisational strategies / policies and programmes and assign clear responsibilities across departments.

Digitalisation

Action	Proposed first steps
<p>HOs, private sector and academia propose collaborative/governance frameworks, advisory platforms, and policy alignment for innovation and interoperability against a common vision, with clear incentivisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HOs, private sector, and academia to form a digital governance taskforce to establish vision and strategic priorities and direction (to be the working group in digitalisation under the collaborative framework).
<p>HOs, donors, and private sector adopt common data standards and a shared taxonomy, building on existing global frameworks, to serve as the foundation for interoperability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donors to provide seed funding for task force• HOs, donors, and private sector launch a sub working group to:• Agree on shared supply chain data standards building on existing frameworks including the Frontline Humanitarian Logistics Data Standard project.• Benchmark agency tools for proposed standards compatibility and against commercial solutions.
<p>HOs, private sector, and academia adopt shared technical standards for digital solutions; promote Application Programming Interfaces' (API) integration and modular digital tools to enable cross-agency data sharing, visibility, and coordinated response.</p>	<p>HOs, private sector, and academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop shared integration blueprint (APIs, protocols).• Pilot system connectivity across 2–3 agencies via a sub working group• Donors to co-fund early integration pilots and system mapping
<p>HOs and donors reframe digital investments as core infrastructure, align funding with strategic coordination and operations optimisation, and promote shared or outsourced development and procurement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donors to endorse digital infrastructure in funding criteria <p>HOs, private sector, and academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage donors to reframe digital systems as infrastructure• Develop joint procurement guidelines for shared services and develop cost benefit analysis mechanism

Preparedness and Localisation

Action	Proposed first steps
<p><i>HOs establish adaptive, context-specific role frameworks at national, regional, and global levels that distinguish preparedness from response, embed mandates in domestic systems, and align coordination, capacity, and decision-making across all humanitarian supply chain actors.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>HOs leverage/build on humanitarian supply chain coordination platforms and protocols which reflect national leadership, local actor participation, and international support.</i>• <i>HOs apply or adapt a maturity model to diagnose existing capacities and leadership readiness for humanitarian supply chains.</i>• <i>HOs define and align roles for humanitarian supply chain actors across preparedness and response phases based on those findings and on national DRM plans.</i>• <i>HOs promote joint planning workshops, after-action reviews, and scenario-based simulations.</i>
<p><i>HOs integrate humanitarian supply chain functions into nationally led systems where appropriate by aligning preparedness and response logistics with domestic infrastructure and policies, while coordinating regional and global support to reinforce local leadership, interoperability, and continuity during crises.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>HOs map national and local capacities, platforms, and integration points across supply chain functions.</i>• <i>HOs increase local access to education related to core supply chain functions.</i>
<p><i>HOs design inclusive and anticipatory humanitarian supply chain planning processes by embedding early warning triggers, co-developing tools with national and local actors, and aligning supply chain preparedness and response strategies to context-specific risks, capacities, and decision-making structures.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>HOs ensure local actors participate and influence in supply chain strategic planning based on national context.</i>
<p><i>Donors develop, strengthen, and institutionalise sustainable financing mechanisms that: provide flexible resources for supply chain preparedness; reduce fragmentation; align multi-year investments with national systems + local priorities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Donors and HOs review existing financing mechanisms and funding streams to integrate supply chain preparedness and localisation.</i>• <i>Donors, HOs, academia and private sector collect evidence and develop analysis and narratives to support supply chain preparedness, as well as the HLGSC shared vision proposed.</i>

- ***Donors, HOs, academia and private sector to map existing initiatives with the private sector and build existing relationships into aggregate, policy level engagement.***